



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

November, 2017

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Many years ago, a wise teacher told his class that the verb “to thank” comes from the verb “to think.” He wasn’t just making a moral point; the etymology is accurate. In prehistoric times, the Germanic noun seems to have expanded from “a thinking of, a remembering” to also mean “remember fondly, think of with gratitude.” The Old English noun chiefly meant “thought, reflection, sentiment; mind, will, purpose,” as well as “grace, mercy, pardon; pleasure, satisfaction” (www.etymonline.com/word/thanks). Accordingly, “Thanksgiving” could be called “Thinksgiving,” since we have to think, to remember, in order to give thanks.

When times are good, it is easy to forget to be grateful. That is the reason we read in Deuteronomy 8:10-14:

When you have eaten and are satisfied, you must bless the Lord, your God, for the good land he has given you. Be careful not to forget the Lord, your God, by failing to keep his commandments and ordinances and statutes which I enjoin on you today: lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built fine houses and lived in them, and your herds and flocks have increased, your silver and gold has increased, and all your property has increased, you then become haughty of heart and forget the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that house of slavery.

A failure to thank God is a sign that we are becoming proud and arrogant. When this happens, we begin to think that we do not need God, that we can do things on our own without God’s help. Deuteronomy 8:17-18 tells us:

You might say in your heart, “It is my own power and the strength of my own hand that has got

me this wealth.” Remember then the Lord, your God, for he is the one who gives you the power to get wealth, by fulfilling, as he has now done, the covenant he swore to your ancestors.

While we may neglect to thank God in good times, we might not want to thank God when times are bad. Yet Scripture urges us to give thanks even when circumstances are difficult. In 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Paul exhorts, “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ.” In later Jewish tradition, we are told, “it is incumbent on a person to bless God for the evil in the same way as for the good” (B. Talmud *Berakoth* 54a).

Why should we thank God for bad things as well as good things? Many books have been written in efforts to answer this question, which remains a mystery. I believe it has something to do with faith in God’s providence. Saint Paul teaches, “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose” (Rm 8:28). In Chapter Four of the Rule, on the instruments of good works, Saint Benedict urges us “to put one’s hope in God.” He concludes the chapter with this: “And never to despair of God’s mercy.” It’s not easy, but we can do all things with God’s grace.

And now the news:

Tucson Oblates

Tucson deans Sharon Hammond and William Joseph attended the International Congress for Benedictine Oblates in Rome. Benedictine Oblates and Oblate directors from all over the world gathered November 4-10 to discuss, share, celebrate, pray, and work together exploring the Congress theme: *A Way Forward - the Benedictine Community in Movement*. Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, was the keynote speaker.

The January Renewal Day will be in Murphy Gallery East on Saturday, January 20, 2018. Further details to follow.

Phoenix Central: The Phoenix group meets in the St. John Paul II room at the Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54th Street. For information call Patty Williams 602-957-1464.

West Phoenix: Meeting in Glendale for a morning of prayer, community, and fellowship on the third Saturday of the month from 9:00 a.m. -noon. Next meeting: November 18th. For information call Lisa Hughes at 623-374-2382.

East Valley: Meetings for November and December will be moved to the third Saturdays of the month to avoid the holidays. Discussion will continue of the *Study Guide for the Rule of St. Benedict*. For information call Nancy Kaib 480-883-8025 or Frank Young 480-219-1505.

Sand Springs: The oblates meet on the first Sunday of the month, September through May, at 11:30 am in the Bede Building. Visitors are always welcome to attend.

At their last meeting, the Sand Springs oblates had an interesting and lively discussion on the Trinity the first three chapters from the book: *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* by Richard Rohr. Thank you, Helen Pratt, for your helpful summary.

Sheridan, Wyoming: The group has decided to meet once a month, on the first Saturday. They will discuss the *Study Guide for the Rule of St. Benedict* for about an hour and then discuss Joan Chittister's book, *Radical Grace*. For information, contact Cel Hope at celhaus@fiberpipe.net. You may also email me at sarah@bspa.us or contact me by phone at 660-944-2221.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah